Jim Henson's™

THE STORYTELLER

Tale Two of Four

Witches

ARCHAIA

KYLA VANDERKLU

TM
GT

MANY, MANY YEARS AGO, THERE EXISTED A SMALL VILLAGE AT THE FOOT OF A MOUNTAIN.
IN THE VILLAGE LIVED AN OLD WOODCUTTER AND HIS APPRENTICE, AND EVERY DAY THEY CLIMBED THE MOUNTAIN TO GATHER WOOD FROM THE FOREST.
WE SHOULD TURN BACK SOON.
WHAT
IN
CAR

FOR?
THERE'S LIGHT YET
THE DAY, AND I CAN
RY MORE THAN THIS.
LOOK TO THE SKIES, MINOKICHI.
THERE'S FOUL WEATHER ON THE WAY.

OLD MOSAKU'S WORDS PROVED TRUE, AND SOON THE TWO WERE ENGULFED IN A BLIZZARD SO THICK, THEY COULD HARDLY TELL THE GROUND FROM THE SKY.

THEY STUMBLED BLINDLY, UNTIL THROUGH THE HAZE MINOKICHI'S YOUNG EYES SPIED:

A SHELTER!

NOT MUCH OF ONE, THOUGH. THE WIND POURS THROUGH AS IF THROUGH A SIEVE.

YOU LOOK LIKE A SNOW DEMON, OLD MAN!

IT'S NOT MEANT FOR WINTER, I SUSPECT, BUT IT MAY SEE US THROUGH THE NIGHT.
WATCH YOUR TONGUE, BOY. THE DEMONS OF THIS MOUNTAIN ARE NO LAUGHING MATTER.
HAVE YOU NOT HEARD THE VILLAGERS TELL OF THE SNOW WITCH?
...THE SNOW WITCH?
AYE, LAD.
A CRUEL CREATURE, AS TERRIBLE AS SHE IS BEAUTIFUL - AND CAPABLE OF NEITHER KINDNESS NOR MERCY.
THEY SAY THOSE WHO SURVIVE A MEETING WITH THE SNOW WITCH ENCOUNTER ONLY HARDSHIP EVER AFTER...

"...BUT FEW SURVIVE."
UNTIL, DEEP IN THE NIGHT...

AND WITH THOSE WORDS HANGING IN THE CHILL AIR BETWEEN THEM, THE TWO FELL ASLEEP.

YOU KNOW...

IT'S QUITE RUDE TO STARE.

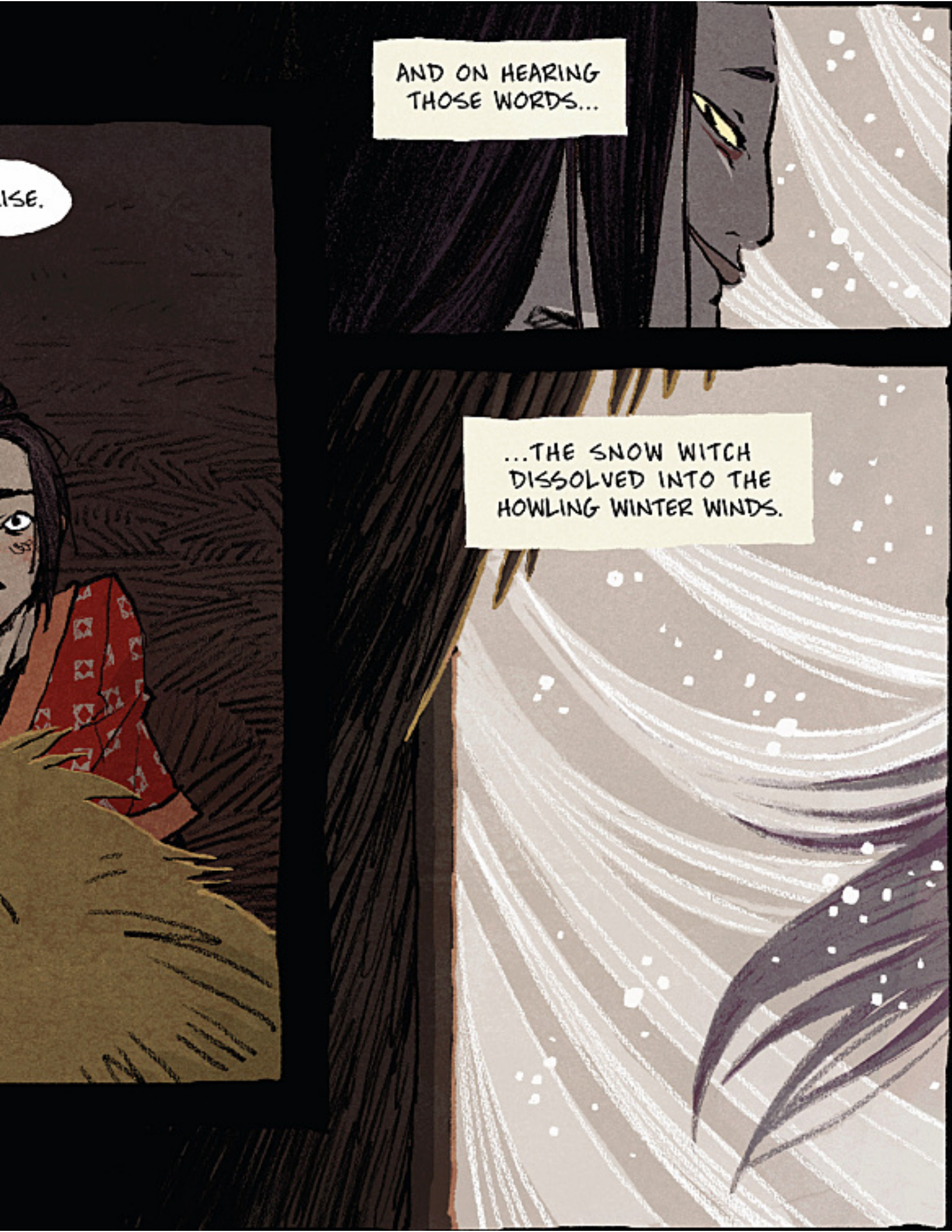
SHALL I EAT YOUR SOUL AS WELL, TO PUNISH YOU?
YOU'RE...
...THE SNOW WITCH?
YOU ATE MOSAKU'S SOUL?

S
I DID.
DID YOU HEAR THOSE AWFUL THINGS HE SAID ABOUT ME?
I THINK HE GOT JUST WHAT HE DESERVED.
DON'T YOU?

BUT IT WAS ONLY OUT OF CONCERN FOR ME THAT MOSAKU SPOKE SO ABOUT YOU!
YOU KNOW...
...YOU ARE VERY YOUNG.
YOUNG E
TO BELIEVE
OF ANY

NOUGH
THE BEST
YONE.
WOULD YOU BELIEVE THIS EVIL WITCH WOULD SPARE YOU, IN RETURN FOR A PROMISE?
ANYONE IS CAPABLE OF KINDNESS...
...I BELIEVE.
YOU HOPE, RATHER.
BUT, YES. I WILL SPARE YOU, ON ONE CONDITION.

PROMISE YOU WILL NEVER SPEAK OF ME TO ANOTHER LIVING SOUL.
IF YOU TELL ANYONE OF THIS MEETING, FOR MY PART, I PROMISE I WILL FIND YOU...
I PROM
...AND PUNISH YOU.


ISE.
AND ON HEARING THOSE WORDS...
...THE SNOW WITCH DISSOLVED INTO THE HOWLING WINTER WINDS.

MINOKICHI RETURNED TO THE VILLAGE ONCE THE STORM PASSED, BRINGING WITH HIM THE BODY OF MOSAKU.
IN TIME, THE STREAM OF QUESTIONS DWINDLED TO A TRICKLE, THEN CEASED; AND MINOKICHI WAS LEFT TO HIS SILENCE.

THE VILLAGERS WERE FULL OF QUESTIONS FOR MINOKICHI, BUT THEIR QUESTIONS WERE MET ONLY WITH SILENCE.

SPRING FOLLOWED WINTER, AND WHEN SUMMER AND AUTUMN HAD PASSED AND WINTER CLOSED ONCE MORE OVER THE VILLAGE, MINOKICHI RETURNED TO THE MOUNTAIN TO GATHER WOOD.
ONE EVENING HE CAME UPON A YOUNG WOMAN AS HE WAS MAKING HIS WAY HOME.

SHE INTRODUCED HERSELF AS OYUKI, AND EXPLAINED THAT SHE WAS TRAVELING TO THE CITY, AND HAD HEARD THERE WAS A VILLAGE NEARBY WHERE SHE MIGHT SPEND THE NIGHT.

IT'S TRUE OUR VILLAGE LIES JUST AHEAD, BUT YOU WON'T FIND ANY INNS THERE.
I SEE...
OF COURSE, IF YOU'VE NOWHERE ELSE TO STAY, YOU'RE WELCOME TO SHARE MY HOUSE.
WOULD THAT NOT BE AN IMPOSITION?
LOOK TO THE SKIES - THERE'S A STORM ON THE WAY. YOU DON'T WANT TO BE OUTSIDE ON A NIGHT LIKE THIS.
I'LL GLADLY ACCEPT YOUR KIND OFFER, THEN.

AND JUST AS MINOKICHI HAD PREDICTED, A STORM SPRUNG UP THAT NIGHT, RATTLING WINDOWS AND DOORS AS THE CHILL WINDS SOUGHT ENTRANCE AND THE SNOW PILED ITSELF AGAINST THE WALLS.

DOES THIS VILLAGE OFTEN SEE STORMS SO STRONG?
I'VE NEVER BEFORE SEEN ONE LIKE THIS...

...EXCEPT HIGH IN THE MOUNTAINS.
I'M AFRAID YOU MAY HAVE TO DELAY YOUR JOURNEY.
THE WARMTH OF YOUR HOSPITALITY MORE THAN MAKES UP FOR ANY DELAY.

THE STORM RAGED FOR DAYS, AND THEIR REGARD FOR EACH OTHER GREW AND GREW, WHILE OYUKI'S DEPARTURE WAS MENTIONED LESS AND LESS.
COME SPRING, THE COUPLE WAS WED, AND OYUKI SOON GAVE BIRTH TO A CHILD.

AND WHEN THE STORM CLEARED, OYUKI NEVER DEPARTED AT ALL, FOR THE TWO HAD FALLEN DEEPLY IN LOVE.
BUT FOLLOWING IN THE WAKE OF THEIR HAPPINESS CAME A CHANGE IN THE VILLAGE.

THE WARM DAYS OF SUMMER BEGAN TO SHORTEN, WHILE THE WINTERS GREW LONGER AND HARSHER, ICY FINGERS CREEPING INTO THE SPRING AND AUTUMN DAYS.

AND WHILE THEIR SON SEEMED TO BLOSSOM IN THE SNOWS AND FROSTS...

...MINOKICHI
BEGAN T

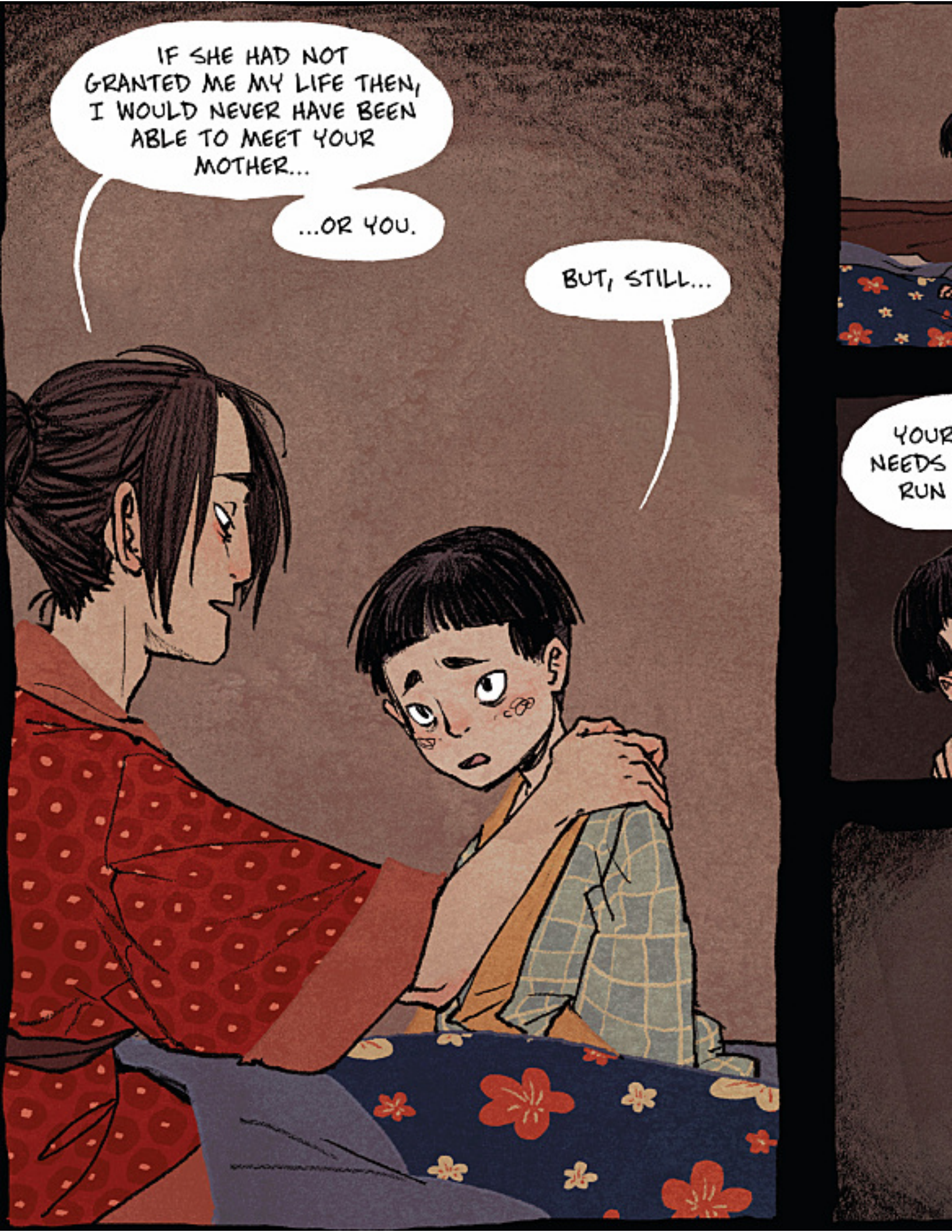
'S HEALTH
TO FAIL.

FATHER...
DO YOU KNOW WHAT THEY SAY IN THE VILLAGE?
THEY SAY THAT HIGH ON THE MOUNTAIN LIVES AN EVIL SNOW WITCH.
THEY SAY SHE'S CURSED OUR VILLAG
FATHER, SO THE SNO
NEVER END.

AND WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THAT STORY?

I THINK WE SHOULD HUNT HER DOWN AND KILL HER!
SHE'S THE ONE MAKING YOU SICK, ISN'T SHE?
I HATE HER.
AND MINOKICHI, SEEING HIS SON'S SPIRIT SO STEEPED IN ANGER, TOOK HIM BY THE HAND AND TOLD HIM ABOUT THAT NIGHT ON THE MOUNTAIN, MANY SEASONS PAST.

ABOUT HOW HE MET THE SNOW WITCH...
...AND ABOUT HOW SHE HAD SHOWN HIM MERCY.


IF SHE HAD NOT GRANTED ME MY LIFE THEN, I WOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN ABLE TO MEET YOUR MOTHER...
...OR YOU.
BUT, STILL...
YOUR
NEEDS
RUN

...NOW YOU'RE DYING.
FATHER HIS REST. ALONG.
THAT WAS A STRANGE TALE YOU TOLD OUR SON.
WILL YOU DESCRIBE HER TO ME, THIS SNOW WITCH YOU MET?

SHE WAS DRESSED ALL IN WHITE...

...WITH WHITE SKIN TO MATCH...
...AND PALE EYES THAT BURNED WITH COLD AND WARMTH ALIKE.

NEXT TO YOU, SHE WAS THE MOST BEAUTIFUL WOMAN I HAD EVER SEEN, AND NOW...

NOW YOU KNOW WHY.

YOU MADE A PROMISE TO ME ON THAT NIGHT, NEVER TO SPEAK OF ME.
WHY DID YOU BREAK THAT PROMISE?
WHY NOW?
YOU...
CAN YOU STI
SAY SUCH THIN
EVEN NOW?
THE
I'VE BR
ARE L
Y
ALL THE SAME
I WOULDN'T CHA
THESE YEARS F
ANYTHING.
I COULDN'T STAND THE THOUGHT OF OUR SON THINKING ILL OF SOMEONE...
...WHO HAD ONCE SHOWN ME KINDNESS.

LL
GS,
SE WINTERS
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EECHING AWAY
OUR LIFE.
I
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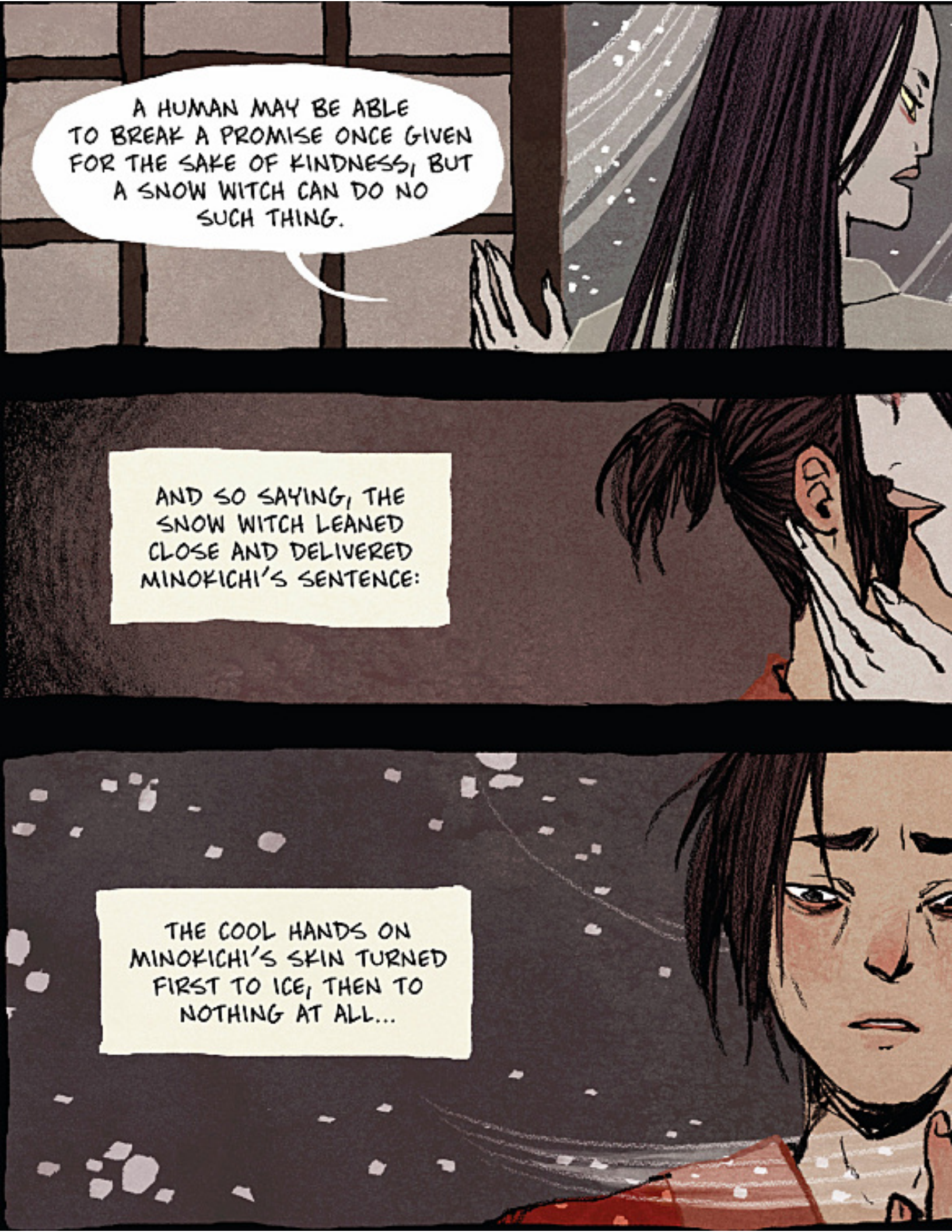
MY LIFE IS A FAIR PRICE FOR THE HAPPINESS I'VE KNOWN WITH YOU.


A HUMAN MAY BE ABLE TO BREAK A PROMISE ONCE GIVEN FOR THE SAKE OF KINDNESS, BUT A SNOW WITCH CAN DO NO SUCH THING.
AND SO SAYING, THE SNOW WITCH LEANED CLOSE AND DELIVERED MINOKICHI'S SENTENCE:
THE COOL HANDS ON MINOKICHI'S SKIN TURNED FIRST TO ICE, THEN TO NOTHING AT ALL...

I PROMISED THAT IF YOU EVER SPOKE OF ME, I WOULD PUNISH YOU - AND PUNISH YOU I SHALL.
"YOU SHALL NEVER SEE ME AGAIN."
...AS THE SNOW WITCH DISSOLVED INTO A FLURRY OF SNOW BEFORE HIS EYES.

AFTER THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE SNOW WITCH, THE LONG, HARSH WINTERS RELEASED THEIR GRIP ON THE VILLAGE.
SPRING RETURNED, AND WITH IT RETURNED MINOKICHI'S GOOD HEALTH.

AND AS HIS STRENGTH GREW AMONGST THE SHOOTING GREENS AND SHIVERING NEW LEAVES, MINOKICHI DEVOTED HIMSELF TO HIS LAST WHISPERED PROMISE TO THE SNOW WITCH:
TO RAISE THEIR SON TO BE ALWAYS KIND.

A new tale spun next month...
the
PHANTOM ISLE
written and illustrated by MATTHEW DOW SMITH

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IN STORES NOW

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the SNOW WITCH

written and illustrated by KYLA VANDERKLUGT

When an old woodcutter and his young apprentice are caught in a blizzard, a mysterious woman dressed in white appears and freezes the woodcutter to death. She spares the apprentice if he vows never to tell of what he has seen, but keeping his word may not be so easy when he falls in love.

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